

Declaration of the National Summit on Workers' Education unanimously adopted by the delegates at the closing session

Delegates, representing the four labour federations in South Africa, representatives of workers in the informal economy in South Africa and internationally, labour service organisations, leading education activists from within the academia and organisations committed to workers' education, met at this first-ever National Summit on Workers' Education on 12th-13th November 2009 at the University of Johannesburg to:

- 1) Explore the development of a common understanding of and the role of worker's education in society;
- 2) Analyse policy developments in the macro education and training arena and its implications for worker's education;
- 3) Generate new ideas to inform national debates, strategies and policy to promote workers education in society in a non sectarian and participatory manner.

We underscore the importance of this summit in the context of the global crisis confronting humanity and to analyse this crisis from a working class perspective. We wish to record that we see a planet and its people in a serious crisis.

This is a crisis caused primarily by the system of capitalism and the effect is:

- Growing unemployment, income inequality, poor public services such as energy, sanitation and poor education and health care for the world's working class and the poor.
- Human induced climate change that is causing havoc in several parts of the world through extreme weather conditions:
- A crisis of high food prices, food shortages and food insecurity for billions of people across the globe whilst food is a basic necessity to sustain life.
- A crisis of urban migration where humans are forced to migrate to the cities in search of the basic means for survival.

There is common cause across the globe, including in developed nations that the system of capitalism has failed humanity as a whole. We are mindful that over the

past centuries capital has and will continuously seek to rescue itself despite repeated failures.

In this context, we reaffirm the view that the working class can alter the course of history in the 21st century. They have the capacity for self-activity to self organise in the workplace, the community, in society and across borders.

We are inspired by the determination of our fellow workers and the poor to struggle against the system and to create a society based on alternatives to the *illogic* of capitalism.

The building blocks for such a transition could include amongst others:

- Bringing about a national health system so that the poor have access to quality health care.
- The establishment of a quality national public education system of lifelong learning for the young and the adult citizens.
- Creating decent work and sustainable livelihoods through expanding alternative forms of production of basic goods and services to meet and sustain the needs of society.
- Building an alternative society based on social solidarity, co-operation and production for which the majority of its citizens particularly the working class can uphold and defend.
- Building a people-centered and people-driven developmental state particularly at local government level.
- Building strong, vibrant democratic organisations of the working class which are at the centre of leading a radical transformation of society.

It becomes vital in the current context for workers education to critically engage and popularize an alternative discourse (i.e. transitional building blocks), and to engage it strategically, in the short to medium term to alter the course of history in the long term.

This summit is one of several important milestones in the road ahead. It provided an opportunity for reflection and to surface the critical challenges facing workers' education and the working class.

Understanding workers education

The Summit helped to clarify the meaning and practice of workers' education.

- It is not neutral.

- It has a specific orientation and is controlled by workers.
- Workers' education is part of building the unity and struggles of the working class in the workplace, in industry, in our local communities and in society.
- It instills critical thinking, collectivism and deconstructs dominant ideas.
- It helps us learn from history.
- It represents the voice of all sections of the working class.
- It must help the class to articulate a common vision and to lead society and articulate alternative models.
- It helps the class create its own intellectuals rooted in the struggles of workers.

Transforming Education to Promote and Advance Workers Education

This summit made several important recommendations on how this could be achieved. It is common cause that our current education and training system at all levels is not meeting and will not meet the needs of the working class in its current form.

We need radical change not only to transform existing institutions but also to create our own institutions. This change must not be driven by technocrats but through mass involvement of the people and organisations across the system.

Workers education must influence all aspects of curriculum including labour studies in the schools that respects the role of workers in society. The labour movement should attract intellectuals in order to have a strategic discussion on how we promote working class values and curriculum across these institutions.

We also must confront the paradox and contradictions of the huge sums of money available for education yet large and important areas of education including workers education are grossly underfunded. This imbalance in funding must be corrected.

Strategies to promote and advance workers' education

Strategies to promote and advance workers education are important to promote the unity and solidarity of the working class. The summit also discussed ideas on how we could take forward a programme for the promotion and advancement of workers education.

The process of transformation must also take place with the labour movement as a start. We must call a discussion of all labour activists and sympathizers within these

structures to develop a vision for a transformative education that is in line with our vision of society.

Workers education must involve youth and young workers to become more involved in organising activity both in the workplace and in the community.

We must develop an engagement strategy with progressive institutions and with sympathetic individuals to find a common vision and programme that guides those within these institutions. Within these institutions we must raise the profile of and the importance of workers' education including advancing a research agenda determined by the working class.

Summit endorses the concept of a national council on workers' education with the main aim of promoting and advancing workers' education guided by the excellent ideas that emerged at this summit and those that exist with the movement. This concept needs further research and discussions.

Ditsela together with LSO's committed to the promotion and advancement are mandated to establish a small steering committee to give effect to this proposal by developing a terms of reference, composition and a action plan which includes the possibility of reconvening this summit in the near future to assess progress made.

In conclusion, the discussions, debates and the declaration adopted at this summit reflect a wonderful sprit of unity, collaboration and commitment to the common principles, values and of working class unity and struggle. The outcomes of this summit must be shared widely within our ranks, our organisations and in society.

We struggle not because we are assured of victory but the mere chance of victory is reason enough.

Forward to workers' education!!!

Forward to working class solidarity, unity and struggle!!!